

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for attending one of the two roundtables sponsored by the Bloomington Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs! We would like to take this opportunity to share some of the comments made and issues raised during the two meetings, and also give back a list of resources available.

Networking as an approach to serving Hispanics and Latinos

Roundtable participants noted that most Hispanics and Latinos with limited command of English tend to seek out one or two trusted individuals to help obtain access to a wide variety of needed services and resources. Even when a wide variety of printed and electronic information is available in Spanish, users may not seek them out and use them unless such materials are provided in a trusting, familiar context. Without stronger networking among all local agencies, many who have valuable information or resources to share could go overlooked, and opportunities could be missed. Attached to this newsletter is a list of agencies that specialize in services and referrals for the local Spanish-speaking population. Please let us know if you have additional resources to offer!

Language access

Many agencies who cannot afford full-time bilingual staff have used volunteers, interns, and over-the-phone services to help with interpreting and translation needs. Participants stressed the need for language-accessible first contact, such as front-office staff or bilingual telephone menus. At the same time, some participants noted that language proficiency is difficult to acquire, and that there is no substitute for accurate and professional translation and interpreting whenever possible. There are several professional medical interpreters in Bloomington who are available either directly or through the Centro Comunal Latino, and volunteer written translations should be checked by qualified translators. Over-the-phone services such as Language Line use professional interpreters in a wide range of languages, and any agency can sign up on a per-minute basis. Family members, and especially children, acting as interpreters is discouraged as they may be either vulnerable, not objective, or inaccurate in a stressful situation.

Cultural training

Several participants mentioned that it would be useful to have occasional trainings and awareness-raising sessions to improve communications with local Spanish-speakers and provide more effective services. The Commission is considering holding networking meetings four times per year, in which the first hour would be spent exchanging information and resources, and the second hour in education and awareness-raising. We will soon send out a targeted email asking for your interest in participating in such meetings.

Feedback from local Spanish-speakers

The Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs is currently in the process of surveying local Spanish-speakers regarding their demographics, interests, opinions and experiences obtaining services and

resources locally. The information collected to date will be shared among all interested parties and will provide useful insights and suggestions for improvement of outreach and services.

Once again, we want to thank you for attending the meetings we hosted and appreciate your insights as well as your concerns in regards to providing quality services to the Latino population in Monroe county. The Commission welcomes any comments and suggestions you may have as to how we can best help you in this endeavor. We hope this will be the first of many fruitful meetings and collaborations. To contact the Commission, please e-mail us at latinocommission@bloomington.in.gov